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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2520
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 2827
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFAAA/DIA WASHDC
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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [SOCI](#) [KDEM](#) [KZ](#)

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: GRASS-ROOTS DEMOCRACY AT WORK

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¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: Leader of the local non-governmental organization "Shanyrak," Asylbek Kozhakhmetov, described on September 29 the situation of internal migrants and his organization's efforts to assist them. Primarily focused at the city-level, Shanyrak is actively involved in a commission to regularize "illegal settlements" and a conflict prevention council. These efforts exemplify Kazakhstan's active civil society, which works in coordination with local governments to address social issues. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) On September 29, the Ambassador met with Asylbek Kozhakhmetov, leader of the local non-governmental organization "Shanyrak." Named after the district where "illegal" residents clashed with police in July 2006 when the authorities attempted to bulldoze approximately 400 houses, Shanyrak engages in issues related to internal migrants and regularization of their homes. Kozhakhmetov told the Ambassador that he has met with many high-ranking officials, including the Prime Minister, but only Almaty's new Mayor Akhmetzhan Yesimov actively responded.

SIGNIFICANT INTERNAL MIGRATION

¶4. (SBU) According to Kozhakhmetov, 300,000 internal migrants have moved from rural areas to the city, and President Nazarbayev has said that Kazakhstan's rural population will fall from 43% to 20% of the total inhabitants. Kazakhstani law requires citizens register their residence in order to obtain allowances and benefits, including access to school, health care, and pensions. However, Kozhakhmetov asserted that some migrants receive "bad land sometimes legally, sometimes illegally," which prevents registration. Further, some buy forged registration documents from local fixers. To ensure legal residence, Shanyrak is pushing to organize new micro-districts with available land and necessary infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, where the residents will be properly documented and registered legally.

¶5. (SBU) Because the current economic crisis has reduced real estate prices, the problem of "illegal settlements is not so hot," Kozhakhmetov said. "Nonetheless, problems associated with internal migration continue without any solution." Therefore, his

organization is preparing amendments to laws and organizing educational programs. Currently, the Ministry of Social Protection has the lead on these issues, with some involvement from the Immigration Police, but Shanyrak is advocating for a new responsible Agency or Ministry because of the inter-agency nature of the problems. Kozhakhmetov asserted that the government supports such a proposal but lacks the money due to the current economic downturn.

PUBLIC COMMISSIONS

¶6. (SBU) Kozhakhmetov described to the Ambassador his involvement in a public commission designed to adjudicate land claims in Shanyrak and 15 micro-districts in the Alatau suburb of Almaty. Unlike previous efforts, which he termed "not transparent," these commissions individually scrutinize each land claim by examining potential evidence, such as utility bills and photographs. Unfortunately, Almaty disbanded its commission due to complaints by other NGOs that demanded a piece of the action but refused to participate effectively, Kozhakhmetov said. These organizations, which wanted to participate in the commission, accused Shanyrak of lying and protracting the process. According to Kozhakhmetov, the Mayor re-established the commission with 18 representatives from various organizations following a meeting between the two men.

¶7. (SBU) Kozhakhmetov also highlighted his initiative of conflict-resolution councils to avoid a repeat of the Shanyrak incident. Established one year ago, with Kozhakhmetov at its head, the council in Almaty includes the Deputy Mayor and representatives of the opposition parties, the Nur-Otan ruling party, entrepreneurial groups, and non-governmental organizations. Although he admitted the council's limited authority, Kozhakhmetov underlined that it successfully stopped conflict escalation in

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several cases. As a result, President Nazarbayev has pledged his support for the creation of such bodies in every region.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: A lawyer by education, Kozhakhmetov adopted the cause of internal migrants after he represented one of the defendants from Shanyrak. He demonstrates the responsibility that Kazakhstani citizens take upon themselves to improve the lives of their compatriots. The responsiveness of the city of Almaty to his calls to address internal migrants' concerns, meanwhile, illustrates the growing importance of grass-roots democracy in Kazakhstani society. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND